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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3115
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1408
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3456
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2842
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ FOREIGN MINISTER SHOWCASES KAMBARATA HYDRO
PROJECT TO AMBASSADORS

BISHKEK 00000598 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a June 5 MFA-sponsored tour for the diplomatic corps of the Toktogul reservoir and Kambarata 2 hydroelectric power station construction project, the Ambassador observed ongoing work to complete the Kyrgyz-financed project. However, the Russian Ambassador cautioned Foreign Minister Sarbayev that Moscow would not allocate any additional funding for the larger Kambarata 1 project. The Uzbek Ambassador raised concerns about Kyrgyz plans to dynamite a mountain to create a "natural dam" that might impact water flows downstream to Uzbekistan. Balancing Bishkek's interest in completing the Kambarata projects with Moscow's funding priorities and Tashkent's qualms about water supplies will be a significant challenge for Kyrgyz diplomacy. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev escorted diplomats on a June 5 tour of the Toktogul reservoir complex and Kambarata 2 hydroelectric power station construction project. Sarbayev said the excursion, which began at 7:00 and ended at midnight, was the first of many planned activities designed to build an esprit de corps among the diplomatic community in the Kyrgyz Republic. He contrasted his country's "openness" in showcasing these facilities to Soviet-era secrecy. Most Ambassadors resident in the Kyrgyz Republic participated in the tour.

Toktogul Reservoir - Running on Empty?

¶3. (SBU) The Toktogul reservoir, which feeds the main hydropower generating complex in the Kyrgyz Republic, appeared quite low. (Note: Kyrgyz authorities have reported that water levels are lower than they were last year. Last winter, the reservoir nearly reached a critical low level that would have curtailed electricity production. End note.) Sarbayev told the Ambassador that the reservoir had last been full in 2000. Overlooking the antiquated control room that regulates an adjacent hydroelectric facility, Jalalabad

Oblast Governor Masirov highlighted the complex's role in providing electricity to Bishkek. (Comment: The Governor's remarks came three days before a June 8 power disruption plunged Bishkek and adjacent areas into darkness. The electricity distribution network has seen little investment since Soviet times. End Comment.)

Moscow Turning off the Tap

¶4. (SBU) The diplomatic delegation then traveled upriver from Toktogul to visit the Kambarata 2 hydropower station construction project. With a backdrop of freshly-poured concrete, Sarbayev pointed out a recently installed turbine (sourced from Russia) and proclaimed that the Kyrgyz-funded project would be completed by the end of 2009. In response to the Ambassador's question about the interaction of Kambarata 1 and 2, Russian Ambassador Vlasov interjected that the Kyrgyz Republic would need to allocate funds for Kambarata 1 as well. (Note: Moscow pledged \$1.7 billion for the Kambarata 1 project as part of a Russian aid package announced when Kyrgyz President Bakiyev said he would close the U.S.-run Manas Air Base. Energy experts have told Embassy that Kambarata 2's generating capacity is quite limited when compared to the larger Kambarata 1 project. End Note.) Vlasov said the \$1.7 billion would not be sufficient for Kambarata 1, and added that Moscow would not provide "one more ruble" to the project.

Uzbek Ambassador Pours Cold Water on Dam Plan

¶5. (SBU) While still digesting Vlasov's remarks, Sarbayev encountered another obstacle in the form of Uzbek Ambassador

BISHKEK 00000598 002.2 OF 002

Pulatkhodzhaev's declaration that proposed Kambarata 2 dam work is "geologically unsafe and untested." Pulatkhodzhaev seemed unimpressed with Sarbayev's assurances that Kyrgyz plans to dynamite a mountain to create a "natural dam" for Kambarata 2 would not interrupt water flows to Uzbekistan. Later, the Kambarata 2 on-site project manager, while describing computer modeling employed by Russian engineers to develop the "natural dam" plan, compounded Pulatkhodzhaev's displeasure by noting that "I would trust the opinion of Russian engineers over the Uzbek Ambassador any day."

The Good Old Days

¶6. (SBU) Amidst the rhetoric, Governor Masirov reflected positively on Moscow's Soviet-era control of today's Kyrgyz Republic. Masirov said he had helped build the Toktogul reservoir complex, and pined for the patriotism that motivated workers to build such projects. While praising the Russian engineers working on Kambarata 2, Masirov said the pairing of "Russian ingenuity and Kyrgyz brawn" harkened back to the "good old days." Without Moscow's past leadership, he surmised, "we would all be Chinese by now." (Comment: His remarks echoed repeated praise Embassy hears for the Soviet era and modern-day Russia, as well as concerns about neighboring China. End Comment.)

Comment

¶7. (SBU) While the Kyrgyz continue to make progress on the small-scale Kambarata 2 project, Bishkek must convince Moscow to disburse the \$1.7 billion for Kambarata 1 and assure Tashkent that water resources will not be withheld. This will be a significant challenge for Kyrgyz diplomacy and President Bakiyev.
GFOELLER